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## VI

### HERBART'S DOCTRINE OF INTEREST

The two words *apperception* and *interest* suggest for us the two most important ideas of Herbart's pedagogy. Apperception implies the mind's reaction against the impressions of the senses—it recognizes and explains to itself what it sees, hears, tastes, touches, or smells. With mere perception we see and hear, but we do not make out for ourselves what it is that we see and hear. When we connect the object seen or heard with the totality of experience and explain it, we are said by Herbart to *apperceive* it. Mere perception without apperception is stupid work. It sees, but it does not "make out" the object. For every object is as it were a ganglion in an infinite network of causal relations—all the influences of the universe flow hither to it and make themselves manifest in it to him who has the inward eye to discover them. The work of discovery is apperception. The causes that have made this object what it is, the future effects of its being and acting, the significance of the whole, these are not to be perceived, but to be *apperceived*.

The idea of apperception is a rallying-point for reform in methods of teaching. The teacher that allows his pupils to stop in words without a sense of their meaning, or to be contented with the inspection of mere things without a study of their relations, needs to be told that not perception but apperception is the result to be sought by teaching. The method that is content with mere things or mere words must give place to a method that connects words with the stored-up human learning associated with them, and that traces up the links of the causal series, which extends outward in every direction from each thing.

Apperception, however, is usually taken by Herbart's dis-

ciples in a more restricted meaning, to include the process of mental reaction in the presence of an object. The mind connects the newly-perceived object with its memories of the same or similar objects and with the reflections that have clustered about it as an individual or a class. It is the process of identification or classification; it is the recognition of the new as a repetition of, or a variation from, the old.

This subjective or inner reaction of the mind is, in fact, a part of the process described above as the tracing-out of the causal network that envelops a thing and makes it to be what it is. It is necessary to the proper understanding of the significance of apperception to bear this in mind. It is the directing of the mind upon the causal nexus. It is always a glimpse, at least, of the genesis of the object (its origination out of other objects) and of its growth into, or production of, other objects. The example given by Noiré of a causal series of this kind in the apperception of a piece of bread, shows BREAD in the middle, a long series of presuppositions before it, and a long train of consequences following it: grain, rye, planting, reaping, threshing, barn, mill, grinding, meal, dough, yeast, hops, lard, kneading, baking, BREAD, food, eating, digesting, nourishment, animal heat, organic tissue, new strength for labor, et cetera. And one could pause on each one of these steps in the causal process and move off laterally on a series of its own. This gives us an idea of the business of man, in comprehending the world in which he lives. Apperception is this act of widening our knowledge of the immediate being of objects by adding to it the mediations or links of dependence that connect it with the totality.

In fact the full force of the idea of apperception cannot be seen and felt until the teacher outgrows the first stage of knowing and sets it aside for a second and higher view which sees the relativity of all things. Each thing is relative in its very essence, being derived from something else different from what it is now, and having a destiny beyond its present in which it will have still different functions.

All acquired knowledge is "apperception-stuff" or material

that we can use for the explanation of new objects presented to us by our senses.

It is evident that the first maxim of pedagogy would direct the teacher to take pains to build up in his pupil a mass of apperception material—a “concept-mass” of associated ideas which will explain to the pupil his world and prepare him to meet the demands on him for action. He must grow in two directions—that of the intellect, and that of the will. Herbart meets this with his doctrine of interest—education must appeal to the pupil's interest.

But Herbart and his disciples do not set up their doctrine of interest solely because the doctrine of apperception would demand it. They have a special reason for it in the fact that they have no place in their psychology for the will as the free self-determination of the soul. Herbart's system makes the soul to be devoid of self-activity and of all multiplicity of attributes.

It is necessary to make clear this important point in Herbart's system.

Greek thought before Plato and Aristotle sought in various ways to solve the contradictions of experience, wherein we see one as many and many as one. The earlier systems were all failures. Only when the idea of self-activity was reached by Plato, and demonstrated by Aristotle, did philosophy attain a firm foundation from which it has never been moved in the two thousand years that have followed.

After the time of William of Occam it seemed indeed for a time as if the basis of ontology had been proved untrustworthy: “All universal ideas must be figments of the intellect.” This direction of thought, however, culminated with the *Inquiry* of Hume: “Even the Ego is only an arbitrary synthesis of feelings and mental images. Causality is only invariable succession.” But Kant just at that time opened a new road to the ontology of Plato and Aristotle by investigating the origin of the ideas of time, space, quantity, quality, and causality. His followers, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel succeeded finally in demonstrating through psychol-

ogy the spiritual results reached by Plato and Aristotle through ontology. Self-activity and not simple pure being is the Absolute.

The philosopher Herbart, although his youth was passed in the days of these highest triumphs of the human intellect, did not enter in and partake. For his philosophy was reactionary. He failed to grasp the idea of self-activity as the principle of philosophy, and as a consequence could not accept either the new solution of Kant and Fichte, or the old one of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Although he borrowed his idea of apperception in part from Leibniz, he was not able to see the insight on which Leibniz had based his *Monadology*, namely the idea of Entelechy or self-active being.

His mind rejected the only two positive solutions that the human race has reached, the Greek and the German. Christian theology has distinctly adopted the Aristotelian proof of the Personality of God.<sup>1</sup> The Kantian school has erected a demonstration equally explicit and satisfactory on a new basis, that of rational psychology.

In the face of these facts Herbart turns back to the pre-Socratic points of view of the Eleatics and Atomists, and adopts with commendation the metaphysics of Parmenides and Democritus!

In his *Introduction to Philosophy* of 1813<sup>2</sup> Herbart shows the foundations of his system. The problems of inherence, change, continuity, and personal identity are to be settled by metaphysics. That is to say, we are to explain how a thing can be one and yet have many properties; how reality can change, or be one thing at one time and another thing at another time; how space and time can be divisible and yet continuous; and, finally, how we can have the consciousness of identity under all our various moods and epochs of growth.

Victor Cousin has told us that a philosopher in explaining a fact should not destroy the fact that he attempts to explain.

<sup>1</sup> See Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, Cap. XIII; and *Summa Theologica*, Qu. II, Art. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Compare also his short *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* of 1831, § 226, Anmerkung.

In other words the explanation should end by showing how the fact is again re-established by the principle of explanation. But Herbart does not re-establish multiplicity in things, the reality of change, nor the continuity of space and time. He destroys them all; proves them to be illusions. Far worse than this, he proves the self to be a composite, and consciousness to be delusion: "The ego is a result of mental pictures (*Vorstellungen*) which unite and interpenetrate one another in a single substance." This "single substance" is the soul, which Herbart counts among the simple substances which have each only one quality and no self-activity. All finite things in time and space arise from the collisions of these "reals." Our intellects and our wills are not substances, but arise only from the mentioned collisions.

Thus Herbart adopts substantially the doctrine of Hume as regards our personal identity. What we call our individuality is only a result of the reaction of the ultimate atoms against one another.

Herbart therefore cannot admit will as belonging to the soul as an ultimate real. In fact he makes will to be a result of the third order of removal from the absolute real. First there are the real souls—inactive and devoid of all qualities except one—having neither intellect nor will nor love. Next Herbart supposes collision to take place and the souls to react against the attacks made on them. This reaction or self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) produces mental images or representations. If we consider these, in their totality, to form the intellect, we shall explain, with Herbart, the feelings by assuming that the partial suppression of one representation by others gives rise to feeling. But the successful struggle of a representation against others that tend to suppress it, is desire. "Desire becomes will when it is accompanied with the supposition that the object of its wishes is attainable." The intellect is the first remove from the real substance; the feeling is the second; the will is the third. In his *General Pedagogics*, published in 1806 (Third Book, Chapter 4), he sums up a discussion of action (*Handeln*) by saying, "Therefore the deed creates the will out

of desire."<sup>3</sup> we should say that the will creates the deed, but Herbart says that the deed creates the will.

It is interesting to note that Herbart must have been impelled to adopt his doctrine of real substances by reading the second chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, published in 1807. That chapter treats of "Thing and deception," that is to say of the self-deception of the second stage of thought which tries to explain the contradiction of unity and multiplicity (thing and properties) by various suppositions; the first of these hypotheses being that the oneness is objective and the multiplicity subjective, or due to different senses (acid to the tongue, white to the eye, cubical to the touch, etc.). Finding this to be untenable, next it supposes the thing to be composed of different substances or materials, and not a unity except to the imagination of the beholder. Thirdly, another hypothesis is adopted, namely, that the things are each simple and have one quality and the multiplicity of properties arises through the relation of each thing to the others. Here we find Herbart's theory. The being for itself is simple and one—the being for others is multiple. Hegel shows however that this involves a new contradiction; for the simple quality itself is not determinate except in relation to others. Hence its being in itself is its being for others. This result Hegel recognizes to be the definition of *force*, and the mind has given up the explanation of the problem of inherence by the idea of thing and properties and adopted the idea of *force* as the explaining principle. Force exists essentially in its manifestation. Force acts or manifests itself if it exists. Here is a better explanation of the one and the many of experience. But Hegel goes on and proves that force presupposes self-activity as behind it—neither things nor forces could be were there not *will* beneath them in the universe. (See the third chapter of the *Phenomenology* for the discussion of force and the demonstration of self-activity.)

However this may be, Herbart stops at the doctrine of reals as beings in themselves, and makes the worlds of nature

<sup>3</sup> *Die That also erzeugt den Willen aus der Begierde.*

and of man to be the product of the mechanical action and reaction of these reals upon one another.

It is necessary to understand Herbart's views as to absolute reality in order to make clear his pedagogy. Even his doctrine of apperception with all its suggestiveness to the teacher,—who is to give attention rather to what the pupil understands than to what he merely sees and memorizes—even this doctrine is seized mechanically by Herbart as the reaction of a series of representations in the mind against the new idea entering through the senses. But the main business of Herbart, now that he had expressly excluded self-activity from the real substances, was to explain moral action or ethics. At the very beginning most people would see that this is entirely hopeless. If self-activity does not belong to the soul but only to some of its phenomena or accidental states (*Zustände*), morality cannot appertain to it. Quite different is Hegel's conclusion in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. For he finds that the insight of the Old Testament that God is a free person and essentially righteous and gracious is the arrival of man at absolute knowing. For so soon as one discovers that absolute being must be self-active or personal, and that to be absolute person it must be just and gracious, he has arrived at the highest possible insight—a knowing which must at the same time be true objectively.

Orientalism parts company with European thinking on this point. For all Oriental thought, except that of the Old Testament, makes the absolute to be something above (in fact below) personality, and above (below) righteousness and goodness, and all this because it makes pure, or empty, being, rather than self-activity, the characteristic of the divine.

Herbart could not but acknowledge the importance of ethical conduct in the world. Kant had filled the air with utterances on the sublimity of the free will and the dignity of virtue. Herbart repudiated Kant's "transcendental freedom," and for him there remained only the appearance or illusion of freedom.<sup>4</sup> For as self-activity does not appertain to the soul

<sup>4</sup> See *Text-book in Psychology*, § 118.

as real substance, of course the will cannot be self-determination, but only the false semblance of it.

And yet the ethical code must be followed. There remains but one way of securing ethical conduct, and that is by causing the soul to receive only ethical representations or to react on the new representations in an ethical manner. Hence the doctrine of interest. Herbart will have the child's interest aroused in ethical views of the world, notwithstanding that, according to his philosophy, all real being is above the ethical—for the ethical only appertains to self-active beings.

If we are in our consciousness and feelings only the battleground between new inflowing ideas and ideas already acquired, we are helpless in our morals until we have been made to acquire a stock of moral ideas. Then the moral ideas already filling our mind will meet the new ideas coming in from without and suppress whatever is antagonistic, or immoral, in them.

Interest, according to Herbart, has two sides, the interest of knowledge or cognition and the interest of sympathy or social co-operation (*Theilnahme*). Each of these has three subdivisions. The empirical, speculative, and æsthetic relate to knowledge; the sympathetic, social, and religious relate to co-operation. Under the empirical, he places natural sciences, languages, and sciences relating to man; under the speculative come mathematics, logic, metaphysics, physics, etc. Under æsthetics he includes the fine arts and poetry.

Here is a noteworthy attempt at co-ordination of studies. Herbart sees the importance of representing, in the course of study, all the essential provinces of human learning and of human conduct. Moreover, he distinguishes branches of instruction into the two grand divisions, those of history—including history and language,—and those of nature—including also mathematics.<sup>5</sup> This is a deep glance into the necessity of correlating the child with the world in which he lives.

Notwithstanding his denial of self-activity to real substances

<sup>5</sup> See his *Outlines of Pedagogy in Lectures*, 1835-41, §§ 37-49.



he often speaks of it as important to the pupil: "Interest is self-activity," "The pupil needs a many-sided self-activity." Freedom, too, is often spoken of as the one desirable thing. But he means freedom and self-activity only as phenomenal and not as essential attributes of the soul as real substance. So, too, the immortality of the soul is affirmed, and faith in God is declared essential. But the immortality of a soul without consciousness or will is the immortality of a nothing. God, too, does not create the "reals," but only their phenomenal disturbances.<sup>6</sup>

This doctrine of Interest has led the disciples of Herbart to various attempts to construct a course of study for elementary and secondary schools. Herbart himself laid much stress on Homer's *Odyssey*, Plato's *Republic*, Vergil's *Æneid*, and similar works. Ziller and Rein have contended for what they call "concentration of studies," arranging the subordinate studies about a central core of literature, Grimm's *Fairy Stories*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the like—a procedure violently condemned by Stoy as excrescences on the Herbartian system.

It must be admitted that no scheme of concentration yet presented escapes wholly from the severe strictures of Stoy.<sup>7</sup> But they have been useful as compelling attention to the deep underlying question of educational values that so seriously occupied the attention of Herbart. The attempted subordination of history, geography, and arithmetic to literature leads immediately to the violation of the first of Herbart's well known "formal steps of instruction," namely, isolation and clearness. He demands that the pupil shall absorb himself in his subject, concentrating all his attention upon it—this is called *Vertiefung*. Then he shall correct his one-sided tendency by *Besinnung*, or the recoil from this specialization toward the opposite direction or that of general human interests, thereby recovering his sanity. The subordination of arithmetic and history to literature produces a neglect of

<sup>6</sup> See Falckenberg's excellent discussion of Herbart in his *History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 516-536.

<sup>7</sup> See De Garmo's *Herbart and Herbartians*, p. 158.

what is peculiar to those branches—and hence they suffer in clearness. The result has been well described by Mr. Marble as “conglomeration” instead of concentration. I have never seen a course of study on the concentration plan that did not in some way show a serious want of balance: the neglect of the principle of variety for the sake of sanity (Herbart’s *Besinnung*) has been noticeable.

But the ethical reason for these attempts at seizing the pupil’s interest must never be lost sight of. They are attempts at developing a will as a derived result out of feelings and intellect. As such they are liable to exaggerations and extremes as remarked by Stoy. A sound psychology holds that the will is a primitive activity of the mind like the intellect and the feelings, and that it is to be respected and appealed to as such. It is always to be treated as something transcendental; namely, as always containing in itself the power of rejecting any and all interests in the world. The great Master, when tempted by the Evil One who offered Him the world and all its interests, replied in effect: “Take them and yourself away.”

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Other contributions by Dr. Harris to the EDUCATIONAL REVIEW have been :

Fruitful lines of investigation in psychology (January, 1891); Compayre’s *Elements of psychology* (January, 1891); City school supervision (February, 1892); Herbart and Pestalozzi compared (May, 1893); Bowen’s *Froebel and education through self-activity* (June, 1893); Report of the Committee of Ten (January, 1894).



